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10. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2000; 283: 2689-2693.

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# *MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION*

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## STRATEGIC PLAN

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### ***Our Vision***

In recognition of the sacrifices made by veterans in service to our country, the Missouri Veterans Commission will lead in providing high quality nursing home care to disabled veterans, in providing a final resting place with honor and compassion, and in facilitating timely, quality benefits administration.

### ***Our Values***

Missouri Veterans Commission values a diverse, highly motivated, well-trained, caring team who are dedicated to providing exceptional care and services to Missouri's veterans.

### ***Our Mission***

To honor and serve the veterans whose dedication and sacrifices have preserved our nation and its freedoms.

## *History/Present Situation*

The Missouri Veterans Commission developed its first strategic plan in 1996 in order to more effectively manage operations during a period of rapid change. During the five years covered by that initial strategic plan the Commission has undertaken significant expansion in existing programs and established several new programs and, in so doing, extended the scope of services provided to veterans in Missouri.

Since 1996 the Commission's Veterans Home Program has grown from operating five Nursing Homes with 750 beds to seven homes with 1150 beds. Current construction projects will, when completed in 2003, increase the total number of beds to 1350. The Homes Program has also developed and implemented a quality management program built upon the use of multiple quality indicators which provides information on a regular basis to management thus helping ensure the provision of high quality care to its residents. In order to facilitate communication most Homes employees have email on their local area networks, which are linked to the Central Office in Jefferson City via a wide area network. This ensures information can be communicated in a timely manner. Having local area networks in the Homes has also allowed for the automation of our timekeeping and medical records systems. Users in the accounting and Human Resources areas also have access to the data warehouse, which provides flexibility in creating and producing reports. In order to stay abreast of rapidly changing technologies, PC and server replacement schedules have been implemented.

The Commission's Service to Veterans Program has undergone a period of rapid change in the past few years. The program has begun using computers to process and track claims thus improving both accuracy and timeliness. Service Officers also have access to the Benefits Delivery Network. Missouri was also one of the first states where State Service Officers successfully completed TRIP training with the federal Department of Veterans Affairs allowing all these Veterans Service Officer's to receive a higher level of accreditation.

In August 2002 the Commission joined with other government agencies and veterans service organizations, under the leadership of Lt. Governor Joe Maxwell, to begin a Veterans Benefits Awareness Program. The goal is to inform Missouri veterans about their VA benefits and to assist them in applying for all benefits for which they are eligible. The Commission's web site was redesigned in order to provide more information about benefits and programs as part of this initiative.

Among the new programs initiated since 1996 is the State Veterans Cemetery Program. Two cemeteries, at Springfield and Higginsville, were opened in 2000. Over 1300 interments took place in these two cemeteries by February 2003. Both cemeteries have a kiosk system to assist visitors in locating gravesites. Two additional veterans cemeteries at Jacksonville and at Bloomfield were completed in October 2003.

## *History/Present Situation (continued)*

In addition the Commission began a Veterans Service Officer Grant Program in 2001 and in its first year awarded over \$400,000 in grants to six organizations. This program has allowed the Commission to assist Veterans Service Organizations and city agencies to continue providing services and assistance to veterans.

Finally, Missouri Veterans Commission completed construction of Community Based Outpatient Clinic at six of the Veterans Homes. The Federal Department of Veterans Affairs operates the clinics. Opened in the summer and fall of 2002 these clinics saw over 8,000 veterans by February 2003.

## *Organizational Mandates*

The Missouri Veterans Commission has determined the following to be our organizational mandates:

1. Aid and assist all eligible veterans and dependents to obtain benefits.
2. Cooperate with federal and state agencies.
3. Accept and distribute federal and state funds.
4. Establish, maintain and operate offices/state veterans homes.
5. License homes according to applicable standards.
6. Maintain accountability for funds.
7. Arrange for and accept gifts (tangible and intangible) from individuals and organizations.
8. Maintain and control state cemeteries.

## *Stakeholders*

In any organization there are diverse groups of stakeholders who have an interest in the operation of that organization. The Missouri Veterans Commission has identified those stakeholders, by category, as listed below. Their input has and will continue to be sought by Commission Staff on an ongoing basis.

- Residents
- Families
- Employees
- Volunteers
- Assistance Leagues
- Veterans Service Organizations
- Healthcare Providers/Local Hospitals
- Local Community Service Organizations
- Other Governmental Agencies (local, state, federal)
- Professional Organizations
- Federal Department of Veterans Affairs
- Labor Relations Partners

## *Environmental Scan*

- 1) The veteran's population of Missouri will continue to decline from 566,400 in 2002 to approximately 540,000 by 2007. However, the number of veterans 85 years of age and older is expected to increase during the same period and the number of veterans 65-84 to remain relatively steady.
- 2) The makeup of the veteran population will also change in the next five years. The percentage of female veterans will continue to grow and Vietnam Era veterans will begin to enter nursing homes in rapidly increasing numbers. This will impact the nature of the services provided by the Commission.
- 3) VA's emphasis on outpatient care and use of Community Based Outcome Clinic's will continue.
- 4) The events of 9-11 and the subsequent "war on terrorism" along with concerns over homeland security are likely to impact VA and veterans services in ways it is still difficult to anticipate.
- 5) The budget crisis affecting Missouri as well as most other state governments is likely to place great stress on funding streams.
- 6) In FY 2001 Missouri ranked 36<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states in federal compensation and pension benefits per veteran. Over 85% of these benefits are compensation which is not income dependent.
- 7) The Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis is expected to be full in 2010. It is one of the most active National Cemeteries in the US performing approximately 17 burials per day. DVA failure to expand Jefferson Barracks or construct a new veteran cemetery would create great pressure to construct a state veterans' cemetery in or near St. Louis.
- 8) Declining membership among Veterans Service Organizations threatens to weaken a major source of political support as well as reduce a significant source of volunteer assistance.
- 9) Increasingly complex federal and state regulations impose an even greater burden upon Commission resources.

## *Strengths*

### **Dedicated, knowledgeable staff who perform their duties with integrity**

The Missouri Veterans Commission staff must assure that veterans receiving long term care or benefits assistance are provided services according to current standards of health care practice and in compliance with laws and regulations of benefits administration. Care and services for veterans are provided in a continuous quality improvement environment and are monitored through an internally developed quality indicator system.

### **Public, legislative and volunteer support**

The Missouri Veterans Commission enjoys strong public support for its programs and has consistently benefited from legislative willingness to support the programs. The public has provided significant donations of both time and resources to facilitate the operation of the Missouri Veterans Homes and Missouri Veterans Cemeteries Programs and Veterans Benefits Supermarkets.

### **Strong human, fiscal and environmental resources**

In addition to a dedicated staff, the Missouri Veterans Commission currently enjoys strong fiscal resources through dedicated funding sources, such as the Veterans Home Fund, Veterans Trust Fund, and the Veterans Commission Capital Improvements Trust Fund. The Missouri Veterans Commission's physical and environmental resources are modern in both technology and design.

### **Good working relationship between each of the Programs and Central Office**

The Missouri Veterans Commission has developed and implemented standardized administrative policies and procedures, including routine formal and informal interactions that provide the foundation for consistent interpretation of policies, opportunities for growth through frequent sharing and system-wide focus on practices that promote quality improvement.

### **Strong and qualified administration**

The Missouri Veterans Commission has placed the direct responsibility for outcomes and the authority for decision making with the Missouri Veterans Home Administrators, the Veterans Cemetery Directors and the Director, Service to Veterans. The Missouri Veterans Commission – Central Office employs a multi-disciplinary staff to provide appropriate support, advocacy, and oversight to its' program managers. Because of the integrity of the administration, this has resulted in improved veteran services and greater pride in the organization.



## *Strengths (continued)*

### **Ability to adapt to change at the appropriate level**

The Missouri Veterans Commission has a history of successful adaptation to rapid change and continues to be well positioned to seize opportunities produced by changes in the external environment to ensure that services remain outcome oriented and customer sensitive.

### **Strong partnerships**

The Missouri Veterans Commission has established strong partnerships with Veterans' Organizations, and federal, state and local government agencies. The Commission has led the nation in partnerships with the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs, including TRIP training and certification for our Veterans Service Officers, construction of new Veterans Homes and Veterans Cemeteries, and construction of new outpatient clinics adjacent to the Veterans Homes.

## *Weaknesses*

### **Inadequate labor pools in some geographic areas**

In some geographic areas the labor pool is inadequate to fill key positions which are critical to the mission of the Missouri Veterans Commission.

### **Inadequate internal and external communication model**

The Commission has not adequately developed a model that defines what information should be communicated, and to whom.

### **Management development and the leadership challenge**

Missouri Veterans Commission has identified a need for development of leadership skills in managers and supervisors in order to enhance the quality of care and services provided to veterans.

## *Opportunities*

### **Utilize Advanced Information Management Systems**

Missouri Veterans Commission has the opportunity to explore and develop the use of information management systems to improve outcome-based management and communications among MVC stakeholders.

### **Capitalize on new opportunities for partnerships with the federal Department of Veterans Affairs, other state agencies and veterans' organizations**

At present there are many opportunities for partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs, other state agencies, and veterans' organizations who share an interest in the mutual benefit of veterans.

### **Use Increased Level of Patriotism and Interest in Military and Veterans Issues**

Since September 11, 2001 there is a heightened degree of patriotism and increased level of support for the military and veterans. This provides the Missouri Veterans Commission opportunities to improve awareness of programs and services we offer and to ensure continued support for these programs.

## *Constraints*

### **Staff Turnover**

Staff turnover is a critical problem for the Veterans Homes. Managing turnover in healthcare industry jobs, in general, is an ongoing challenge. Because of the lack of competitive salaries for state employees, demanding and difficult work assignments leading to burnout, and shift, weekend, and holiday work schedules, it is difficult to recruit and retain staff. This creates challenges in assuring the continuity of services provided by staff in a round-the-clock coverage setting. This ultimately creates a constant drain on resources and productivity.

Staff turnover is also a critical problem for the Service to Veterans program. It has become increasingly difficult to maintain an experienced well-trained staff of Service Officers. Salaries are not currently competitive and keeping experienced personnel is a growing concern, especially in metropolitan areas.

### **Resistance to change**

Some stakeholders (both internal and external) are resistant to the changes necessitated by a rapidly changing external environment and federal regulations.

### **Resource Limitations/Competing Interest**

Operating rules of state and federal government restricts the Missouri Veterans Commissions' speed to respond to problems in a timely and effective manner.

Operating rules of state and federal government restricts the speed with which the Commission can respond to changing circumstances and requirements.

## *Overview*

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### *Strategic Issues Affecting the Missouri Veterans Commission*

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The Missouri Veterans Commission recognizes our responsibility to provide excellent care and service, both to our existing and our potential future clientele, by maintaining a workforce that reflects the diversity of Missouri's citizens. Toward this end, we have identified the following as key elements of our strategic direction through the year 2006:

1. In the past eight years, the Missouri Veterans Commission has experienced enormous growth in the demand for services and in the size and complexity of administered programs. We need to create and promote an organizational culture that supports growth.
2. In partnership with the Federal Department of Veteran's Affairs and Veteran's Service Organizations we need to develop systems to expand information on veteran's benefits, eligibility and quality of applications.
3. Missouri Veterans Commission needs to proactively communicate its mission to external partners and stakeholders.

## *Strategic Issue #1*

In the past eight years, Missouri Veterans Commission has experienced enormous growth in the demand for services and in the size and complexity of administered programs. We need to create and promote an organizational culture that supports growth.

We intend to focus on three goals in creating the organizational culture:

1. Recruiting and retaining qualified, high performance employees;
2. Developing leaders at every level who will promote and sustain the organizational culture;
3. Establishing the decision making and communication models based on defined roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.

***Goal #1:***

By June 2006, recruit and retain qualified, high performance employees.

***Desired Outcomes:***

A workforce that is *highly* competent and *highly* committed to achieving MVC overall mission and goals.

***Outcome Measures:***

Rate of turnover by classification and shift  
Rate of retention by classification and shift  
Number of employees who meet defined core competencies for their positions  
Number of qualified applicants for positions by classification  
Average vacancy rate by classification  
Employee exit interviews  
Employee satisfaction surveys  
Number of employees with development plans  
Training tracking of professional development opportunities  
Grievance tracking results  
Quality measures of probationary rates

***Objectives:***

To increase retention rates for qualified, high performance employees  
To recruit qualified employees as needed to fill vacancies  
To establish developmental plans for every employee for professional growth  
To surround high performing employees with other high performers  
To implement a meaningful recognition and reward system for high performers

## *Strategic Issue #1 (continued)*

### ***Strategies:***

By October 2004 develop an action plan to achieve the following:  
Identify non-traditional recruitment methods to attract applicants  
Identify indicators of high performance by classification  
Establish and use skill sets and competencies for hiring, promotion, and transfer  
Determine variables that influence turnover by program  
Use probationary periods as an effective working test to demonstrate performance  
Measure and analyze baseline turnover rates by class, shift and program  
Compare baseline turnover/retention rates to national and industry averages

### ***Goal #2:***

By June 2006 develop leaders at every level who will promote and sustain the organizational culture

### ***Desired Outcomes:***

Leaders at every level who can develop and retain high performers; and articulate and direct individuals towards the achievement of agency mission, goals and priorities.

### ***Outcome Measures:***

Quality Indicators of leadership training transfer  
Grievance tracking by supervisor/work unit/issue  
Quality indicators on work unit probation rates  
Leadership expectations in leadership component of performance management  
Turnover and retention rates by supervisor and work unit  
Quality indicators tracking effective use of coaching and redirecting

### ***Objectives:***

To establish leaders where the action is and where service is delivered  
To establish a set of overarching principles/philosophies of leadership in MVC  
To develop leaders who set straightforward and meaningful work goals  
To develop leaders who make it important to achieve  
To develop leaders who can reward achievement as well as address failures in balance with circumstance

### ***Strategies:***

By October 2004 develop an action plan to achieve the following:  
Establish supervisory responsibility and accountability for performance in assigned work units

## *Strategic Issue #1 (continued)*

- Identify and reward performance success for supervision, not super technician
- Establish supervisory responsibility for work unit turnover and retention rates
- Create a sense of work unit ownership and responsibility in each supervisor
- Create specific objectives for progress by work unit
- Establish clear focus on how the supervisor is responsible for unit's performance

### ***Goal #3:***

By June 2006 establish decision making, communication, and performance management as mechanisms to define roles, responsibilities, accountabilities

### ***Desired Outcomes:***

Consistent models of decision making, communication, and performance management to support the employee (Goal #1) and the leaders (Goal #2) in creating an organizational culture.

### ***Outcome Measures:***

- Quality indicators measuring work unit performance in agency goals
- Performance plans reflecting skills sets and competencies
- Performance plans with established standards for high performance
- Rate of employees aware of an understanding agency and work unit goals
- Employee satisfaction survey results: involvement and communication
- Supervisory performance components on decision making and communication

### ***Objectives:***

- To use a consistent approach to problem solving, decision making, communication
- To establish a mechanism to link employee performance with agency goals
- To develop leaders who can analyze and problem solve; identify areas for improvement
- To develop leaders who articulate agency direction and incorporate it in everyday operations
- To develop leaders who can and do take responsibility using proven methods to resolve problems

### ***Strategies:***

By October 2004 develop an action plan to achieve the following:  
Development of a communication model to articulate theme, purpose, direction



## *Strategic Issue #1 (continued)*

Development of a decision making model determining accountability/involvement

Use of performance plans to establish roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities

Establishment of on-job references for problem solving; decision making; communication

## *Strategic Issue #2*

In partnership with the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Service Organizations, develop systems to expand information on veteran's benefits, eligibility and quality of applications.

***Goal:***

By June 2005 expand the number of Missouri veterans receiving DVA benefits to which they are entitled.

***Desired Outcomes:***

To increase the number of DVA claims filed in Missouri.

To reduce the time between the date of the application and the decision by improving accuracy and completeness of original claims.

***Outcome Measures:***

Number of claims filed

Number of claims decisions made timely

Number of accurately completed original claims

***Objectives:***

To reach all eligible veterans within the State of Missouri to make them aware of earned benefits.

***Strategies:***

By October 2004 provide training for all MVC and Service Organization Service Officers in Federal DVA TRIP (Training, Responsibility in Preparation of Claims) at level 3 accreditation.

By October 2004 in cooperation with the Veterans Service Organizations and DVA, develop techniques and messages to reach Missouri's veterans with benefits eligibility information.

## *Strategic Issue #3*

MVC needs to proactively communicate its mission to external partners and stakeholders.

**Goals:** By June 2006, utilize a communication model and processes that increase awareness of the MVC mission to our external partners and stakeholders.

***Desired Outcomes:***

Increase awareness of MVC mission and establish a unified direction with partners and organizations

***Outcome Measures:***

Number of forums  
Number of partnerships  
Number of ads/media outlets  
Number of agreed upon goals  
Donations to MVC foundation  
Donations to trust funds  
Donations to Assistance Leagues

**Objectives:** To improve current MVC communication activities and processes  
To develop a standardized and effective communication model

**Strategies:** By October 2004, develop an action plan to achieve the following:  
Implement the results received from external consultant's evaluation of our current communication processes and recommendations of an appropriate communication model  
Increase presence at events  
Develop a communication model  
Standardize presentations  
Develop newsletters  
Develop common media formats  
Establish forums in which to promote partnerships and information

## *Definitions of Terms and Acronyms*

**Assistance Leagues** – A group of veterans through whom donations from veteran organizations, private individuals and businesses make many purchases to improve the lives of the resident veterans of the homes.

**VSO** - Veterans Service Officer

**TRIP** – Training Responsibility Involvement and Preparation of Claims

**CBOC** - Community Based Outpatient Clinics

**VBATF** – Veterans Benefit Awareness Task Force

**DVA** – Department Veterans Affairs also VA

**MVC** – Missouri Veterans Commission

**STV** – Service to Veterans

**MVH** – Missouri Veterans Home